Volume II.
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Week of
November 24, 1941

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of November 24, 1941.*
†"Little Dark Horse" opened Sunday, November 16th, at the John Golden Theatre.
†"Ring Around Elizabeth" opened Monday, November 17th, at the Playhouse Theatre.
†"Junior Miss" opened Tuesday, November 18th, at the Lyceum Theatre.
†"Walk Into My Parlor" opened Wednesday, November 19th, at the Forrest Theatre.
†"The Seventh Trumpet" opened Friday, November 21st, at the Mansfield Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"The Seventh Trumpet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 22, 1941*

"The Seventh Trumpet," a War Drama, Opens at the Mansfield

By WILELLA WALDORF

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY'S own particular version of the bombing of Britain, entitled "The Seventh Trumpet," was produced last night at the Mansfield Theatre with the author himself officiating as stage director, cloistered scenic effects by Jo Mielziner, incidental organ music by Horace Middleton, loud off-stage noise indicating German planes in the vicinity, and seven actors who gave it their all.

Mr. Kennedy, now over seventy years old, is the author of some eighteen plays, including "The Servant in the House" and "The Terrible Meek." "The Seventh Trumpet," his latest work, is the seventh and last drama in a group entitled "Repertory of Seven Plays for a Company of Seven Players."

Although "The Servant in the House" was one of Walter Hampden's most popular vehicles at one time, and a revival was presented here some fifteen years ago, this reviewer had never before encountered one of Mr. Kennedy's plays. We were therefore ill prepared for "The Seventh Trumpet." Mr. Kennedy's amazing command of the English language proved quite overpowering before the evening was over.

While the Germans are bombing Britain, Mr. Kennedy bombards his audience with words—and such words! The author of "The Seventh Trumpet," a devoutly religious man, apparently thinks almost entirely in polysyllables. His actors, therefore, are called upon to indulge in the most elaborate verbiage, and the first two acts of the play are incredibly static, being given over to a series of long speeches in which each character tells the story of his life, and two priests, one English, one Greek, conduct an interminable theological discussion, interspersed with Scriptural quotations supplied, along with chapter and verse, by the Methodist gardener who has come in to look after the flowerbeds at the bombed monastery.

Mr. Kennedy has laid his drama in Glastonbury, sacred to King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and the London Bobby who disposed of a time bomb that all but destroyed St. Paul's Cathedral is playfully dubbed Sir Percival of Ludgate Hill by Lady Madeleine, who is nursing him back to health. Lady Madeleine's grandfather, once wealthy industrialist who has become a monk, enunciates Mr. Kennedy's most profound theses, comparing the Second World War to Armageddon, the struggle of righteousness against the reign of the beast.

When Lady Madeleine recalled a young German she had known at Cambridge, and her grandfather looked at her fondly and said: "Still that enthusiastic connoisseur of personality, I see!" it was pretty obvious that the young German would shortly drop in, and he does by way of climax at the close of the second act. He was, of course, the German who bombed the monastery to bits the night before. "You unmitigated swine!" ejaculates Lady Madeleine, and slaps him in the face.

The third act picks up dramatically, for the German is a Hitler fanatic and he enunciates his philosophy of force with considerable vehemence before the big air attack begins. "The Seventh Trumpet" rivals "The Wookey" in the zooming of planes and explosions of bombs before it is over, but Mr. Kennedy's words still reverberate through the theatre, bravely competing with the Luftwaffe to the very end.

A Company of Seven

The actors, all of them to be congratulated on remembering their lines, bore up nobly under the strain. Peter Cushing as the saintly bobby, Carmen Mathews as Lady Madeleine and Alan Handley as the Hitlerite being particularly successful. Ian Maclaren as Father Bede, who had the most gruelling assignment of the lot, intoned his preachments rhythmically, with assistance in broken English from Thaddeus Suski as the Brother of the Greek Orthodox Church on a pilgrimage to Glastonbury all the way from the Balkans. A. G. Andrews and Leslie Bingham supplied local color as simple townsfolk with hearts of gold.

"The Seventh Trumpet," we understand, has been endorsed, in manuscript, by every major churchman in New York, regardless of creed. Studied in the quietude of the library, it is possible there is more to the play than listening to it in a theatre would seem to indicate. It is, however, so intensely static as a stage production and so overcrowded with long, elaborate speeches that one is at first fascinated, then benumbed.

"The Seventh Trumpet" is a rare experience in the theatre, but we can't say it is one that we should like to repeat.

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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

"The Seventh Trumpet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 22, 1941*

Seventh Trumpet Blows at Mansfield

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT WOULD be interesting to find out what Maxwell Anderson thinks of Charles Rann Kennedy's The Seventh Trumpet. It was Mr. Anderson, after all, who not long ago in his Rutgers sermon was insisting that excellence on the stage is always moral excellence. This is a pretty sentiment so far as calendars and college orations go. But I doubt if even Mr. Anderson would arise to defend it from challengers had he been at the Mansfield last evening.

No drama could be more morally excellent than is Mr. Kennedy's play about wartime Britain. It is peopled by a group of later-day saints. These include two holy men, a Red Cross nurse, a scripture-quoting old codger, a sharp-tongued woman who sees the light, a London bobby, the hero of Ludgate Hill, who in Mr. Kennedy's far-seeing eyes is a Chaucerian knight, and a Nazi aviator who is so converted by the mass-goodness and group forgiveness of his enemies that he goes out and commits suicide, saying "Hell, Hitler" rather than "Hell."

All of these saintly autoblographers are found talking, talking, talking for three static and devotional acts near the ruins of a bombed monastery close to Glastonbury, England. Even the Nazi, who represents the forces of anti-Christ, is quite a talker in Mr. Kennedy's sleepiest liturgical manner. All save he are looking for the Holy Grail. What is more, they find it. And with fall of the final curtain the seventh trumpet of Armageddon is supposed to be heard. The old world has died, and a new and better one has begun; a world free of totalitarianism, imperialism, Manchesterism and ignoble profits; free, one gathers, of everything except Mr. Kennedy's noble prophets.

Now, as hinted, no play could be more morally excellent than Mr. Kennedy's sermon. Doubtless it is something that every Bennett School girl should see. Its sincerity is beyond question. Yet no drama could be less dramatic or more deadly. It says all those things you believe in just the way calculated to make you cringe at hearing them said. The purple patches in its endless sermons prove as embarrassing as the script's technical ineptitudes.

• • •

The production does not help. It moves with the swiftness of a lame turtle. Its pace is something to make an unwound clock seem sprightly. Nor is it aided—in spite of the valiant work of Carmen Mathews—by some of the pious actors whose idea of suggesting virtue appears to be to croak like weary bullfrogs in stagnant pond.

In the presence of such a religious drama as The Seventh Trumpet those of us who are reviewers have no place. It is none of our business, being more of a service than a play. It is too churchy for us. Most decidedly we are in the wrong pew. But we are not alone.

'THE SEVENTH TRUMPET'

A play in three acts by Charles Rann Kennedy; staged by the author; lighting and scenery by Jo Mielziner; production supervised by Jean Rose-thal; presented at the Mansfield Theatre on Friday, November 21, 1941, by the Theatre Associates. The cast:

Sam Broiribb.....A. G. Andrews
Percival.....Peter Cushing
Deborah Broome.....Leslie Bingham
Lady Madeleine.....Carmen Mathews
Bathers-Bede.....Ian MacLaren
Brother Ambrose.....Thaddeus Suski
Bomber 666.....Alan Handley

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 22, 1941*

War Play

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE can be no doubt about the high-mindedness and the lofty aspirations of "The Seventh Trumpet." Seeing the Second World War from the loftiest of religious heights, it is concerned with no less matters than the existence of the spirit of the Round Table and the Holy Grail in present-day England, the identification of Hitler with the Beast of the Apocalypse, and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, together with an appeal for Christian Socialism and a denunciation of the influence of Manchester in British politics. But if the loftiness of Mr. Charles Rann Kennedy's new drama is indisputable, so, I am forced to say, is its utter ineffectuality as drama. It is, in truth, so turgid, so muddled and so hopelessly undramatic that it emerges as nothing but a colossal bore.

• • •

Although as a playwright, Mr. Kennedy is noble and idealistic, he is also decidedly homicidal. There are seven characters in his play, and, in a fine burst of frenzy, he kills off all of them, six in an air raid and one as a suicide. That, however, should not delude you into any belief that "The Seventh Trumpet" is a melodrama. On the contrary, it is a highly mystic exercise in spirituality, wherein a group of noble Brittons of various sexes think lofty thoughts and then talk about them cloudily. The scene is the vicinity of a monastery near Glastonbury, which has just been bombed, by a Nazi aviator who calls himself, symbolically, Bomber 666. The most spiritual talker of the lot is a monk who had been a business man, but, as he gracefully puts it, disliked "prostituting your life to make a filthy living." At another point he says, "We English have always kept up a radiant subtlety of spiritual awareness."

• • •

Then, there is a wounded policeman, who has been crippled while removing a time bomb from Ludgate Hill. They all call him Sir Percival and talk to him quite a lot about the search for the Holy Grail. Then there is a mysterious Greek monk, who was suspected by various uncouth fellows in the audience of being a disguised fifth-columnist, but who turns out to be the most spiritual man on the stage, which is no small achievement. Among the devout people of the cast are an argumentative peasant, a combative but spiritual woman servant and a nurse named Lady Madeleine, who had once loved a German student but who calls him an "unmitigated swine" when he returns as a bomber. Finally she gives him his pistol and he goes offstage to shoot himself, while German planes hover overhead and finally kill the other actors. Up to that point the players have been highly elocutionary, but their slaughter really does not make this a pro-Nazi play.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 23, 1941

'Seventh Trumpet,' A Quiet Evening

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE author of the once famous *Servant in the House* remains in *The Seventh Trumpet* a man of deep religious emotion and lofty endeavor. He has written a play about the war, crying for the destruction of Nazism and British plutocracy alike, and pleading for the substitution of a kind of Christian Socialism and the knightly spirit of the Arthurian Round Table. But, however noble in aim, *The Seventh Trumpet* is utterly appalling in execution and less easily called a play than an interminable piece of rant and sermonizing.

Mr. Kennedy has brought together on the lawn of a ruined chapel near Glastonbury such characters as a Cockney war hero named Percival, a high-born nurse called the Lady Madeleine, an English peasant, an old priest, who once had been a luxury-loving capitalist, and a visionary monk from the Balkans who talks more like some one from Lancashire. All these people take turns making incredibly long speeches couched in unbelievably florid language. Indeed, at its most romantic and colloquial, the dialogue takes the form of the Lady Madeleine's "I verily believe that you are the only perfect knight of my life, Sir Percival."

At the end, in a terrific crescendo of noise and a blinding flash of light, everybody is killed during a German air raid. But otherwise there is so little action that shifting a chair is an event and crossing from one side of the stage to the other a veritable climax.

"The Seventh Trumpet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 22, 1941*

'Seventh Trumpet,' New Play By Kennedy, at the Mansfield

Author Emerges From 33-Year Retirement

By JOHN ANDERSON

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY, who achieved wide renown away back in 1908 as the author of "The Servant in the House" emerged from his long retirement last night with a new play presented at the Mansfield by the Theatre Associates and called "The Seventh Trumpet."

It is more of a religious exercise than a play, but since its tone is pious, its intentions noble, and its language inflated if not exalted, I can only wish that Mr. Kennedy had conducted his ceremonies in some private shrine, safe from embarrassing exposure, and the unpleasant duties of public criticism. It is not easy to spank a man at a moment when he has prostrated himself in an act of faith. It would be kinder to tiptoe away and pretend not to notice—kinder to maintain a shrugging silence.

For while Mr. Kennedy's reverent though peculiar postures are obviously sincere and possibly inspiring to those who can control their irreverent snickers, their expression in drama quite often provokes the sort of suppressed merriment that is aroused by an accident in church. It is not what he says but the way he says it that makes it almost impossible to believe your ears. The spirit is willing, but the flesh can be pushed just so far without hitting the funnybone.

Deep Earnestness

Since Mr. Kennedy's play has already been praised, from its script, by several devout gentlemen of the cloth, this reaction may come to the author as a painful surprise. He may suspect that the theatre is not the temple it is, but a crass institution, given over to ribaldry, and unattuned to loftier matters. I can only beg him to believe that his failure to achieve a proper sublimity is his own fault. His characters are unreal, their language artificial and pompous and the situations stilted. Only the author's deep earnestness in his message holds the play inside the critical zone of politely empty respect.

Mr. Kennedy's message, delivered from the bombed ruins of a monastery near Bristol, England, is one of "universal brotherhood, the triumph of the spirit of forgiveness, and the existence of a true spiritual democracy." The locale is the place where legend says the Holy Grail was buried and in this atmosphere the author examines, if I may again quote his obliging press bureau, "the Arthurian spirit which he believes is somewhere inherent in the soul of every Englishman."

The seven characters (Mr. Kennedy's mystical seven) explain their several faiths in talk which is a Round Table discussion if not King Arthur's. Father Bede's granddaughter, once in love with a young German at Cambridge, discovers when he is shot down, that he wrecked the monastery.

Nazi Shoots Self

He proclaims the Hitler devil worship in the presence of a crippled London Bobby (Sir Percival to you) a Holy, if not wholly articulate man from a Greek monastery at Thermopalae, an English peasant, and a cranky woman with a heart of gold. They all listen, and then they all talk.

They make long speeches on the nature of faith, the wisdom of God, the necessity of forgiving our enemies, and the sublimity of victory in death. Mr. Kennedy even takes time out to write off British industrial plutocracy and imperialism. After a while the Nazi (seeing apparently no other way out, and preferring death to dialogue) shoots himself. The others stand valorously in the face of fresh bombers and die gloriously to organ music and Mr. Kennedy's vocabulary with all stops out.

With all the will in the world to say "Amen" to the argument it is impossible to ignore the impression that Mr. Kennedy has beaten his wings all evening without once soaring off ground level.

I copied down passages of dialogue to bear witness to the high flown ineptitude of the writing, but I honestly haven't the heart to print them.

To fill out this skeptical and possibly mundane report I feel that I should add that the Dean of St. Mary's College in California believes the play to be "as real a plea for peace as 'The Trojan Women,' as real a plea for honor as 'The Cid,' as divine a comedy as 'Cyrano'." Walter M. Howlett, secretary of the Greater New York Federation of Churches, says the play is "tremendous" and one of the most impressive plays he has ever read. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise found it, he wrote Mr. Kennedy, "a beautiful and noble utterance."

They will, I hope, in the play's mood of forgiveness, pray for me when I suspect that it is no more than a form of spiritual bingo.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 22, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"The Seventh Trumpet"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE Charles Rann Kennedy is a religious man, he strikes at Hitler with the sword of faith. "The Seventh Trumpet" is the title of a dramatized sermon he has written. It was acted at the Mansfield last evening. On the lawn of a primitive chapel of St. Lazarus, near Glastonbury, England, he has gathered some men of God and some representatives of the war-rimmed island and has set them to discussing the satanic fury of the Nazis in terms of the Christian religion.

Although Mr. Kennedy's faith is to be respected, his play is a cloudy one, more and more deeply enmeshed in argument as the evening progresses. Like many other plays and studies that dwell on the spiritual negation of Nazi-ism, it does not contribute much to the common understanding of the subject. "The Wookeys'" valiant faith by works is more effective on the scorched ground as well as in the blue empyrean.

* * *

The play opens on the day after the St. St. Lazarus monastery has been bombed and destroyed. To Mr. Kennedy it is a symbol of the seventh trumpet that announces the destruction of the Old World and the beginning of the New. Although Father Bede mourns the lost monastery, he is glad to have property removed and to make a fresh beginning with faith and love. There is a general breaking down of old barriers. A Calvinist deacon renounces his bitter hatred of popery, Lady Madeleine loses herself in admiration for the heroism of a shattered London bobby. A representative of the Greek Church comes from the Balkans to stand with his English brothers in the country where the Holy Grail rests.

* * *

When "The Seventh Trumpet" discusses the Christian doctrine of forgiving one's enemies, Mr. Kennedy comes to an interesting subject. He introduces to the play the Nazi aviator who has bombed the monastery and killed two English aviators dear to Deborah Broome, who raised them. Although he is forgiven by Lady Madeleine, who knew him and loved him when he was a student at Cambridge, forgiveness is a bitter pill for most of the characters to follow, and Mr. Kennedy does not resolve this problem in dramatic terms. For his drama is a lucubration of words. People in England are living the religion that the rest of us are solemnly talking about.

* * *

The play is acted before one of Jo Mielziner's less-inspired settings and in a conventional performance directed by the author. Ian Maclaren acts the central part of Father Bede with immaculate piety. Carmen Mathews and Peter Cushing play Lady Madeleine and the heroic bobby respectively and respectfully, and Leslie Bingham acts Deborah Broome with warm colloquialism. As the Greek monk, Thaddeus Suski gives a cadaverous performance that crosses the borderline from the sublime to the ridiculous. Alan Handley is unable to make much out of the part of the Nazi aviator. But A. G. Andrews has the only interesting part to play as a short-tempered Calvinist deacon with a generous heart, and he plays it with delightfully testy flavor.

No one will be disposed to quarrel with Mr. Kennedy's exalted sentiments in "The Seventh Trumpet." But many people who share his faith must conclude that his play does not clarify or strengthen them. Nor does it illuminate the darkness as much as the deeds of the men and women who are facing Hitler's clattering legions.

"The Seventh Trumpet"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 22, 1941*

'Seventh Trumpet' Is a Call to Faith And a Static Play

"The Seventh Trumpet," drama by Charles Rann Kennedy. Produced by Theatre Associates at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Nov. 21, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

BRETHREN, the decision this morning is a tough one. Should we assign Charles Rann Kennedy, the author of "The Seventh Trumpet," three stars as an earnest and often an eloquent preacher? Or should we chop him down to one star as a befuddled dramatist who doesn't, as a teacher of drama, practice what he preaches?

Compromise being the easiest way out at 11:30 P.M., we shall raise the two-star warning signal and let those who run read into it what they choose.

"The Seventh Trumpet" is a dramatic sermon whose faith-inspired reader accepts the Second World War as the Armageddon prophesied of the Bible, and who sees through its levelling and exalting, its deadening and its inspiring consequences, such a turning to a common religion of brotherhood as Christian socialists have preached hopelessly these many years.

Chapel Forum

On the lawn of the chapel of St. Lazarus, near Glastonbury, England, the morning after a Nazi bomber has blown the monastery to bits, there gathers a group of symbolic characters, there to compare conclusions and convictions in the hope of clearing their own minds as to God's intentions respecting a world He seems to be on the point of destroying.

"Each of the seven characters in the play serves a definite purpose," the author has written; "each epitomizes a particular theme.

"In Father Bede is seen the wealthy man who found his soul, became a priest and poured the family wealth into a monastery. Sam Brodribb is the typical English peasant—in times of peace he disagrees bitterly with Bede's theological beliefs, but when the Nazis come, all differences are set aside to fight for the common good.

"In Lady Madeleine and Deborah the ideal of forgiveness is realized, for they can forgive Bomber 666, who epitomizes the Nazi ideology and beastliness.

"Percival, who shattered his own body to save the citizens of Ludgate Hill from a time bomb, is today's Knight of the Round Table. Ambrose, the Greek priest who says God sent him to find the Grail and die with the others, is truly the spirit of God on earth."

There you have the symbolism that inspired Mr. Kennedy, who will be recalled by older playwrights as the author of "The Servant in the House," and by several hundred present day drama students as the silver-haired head of the drama department at the Bennett School in Millbrook, N. Y.

Doesn't Act

It is a worthy and an impressive symbolism, but it does not provide, in Mr. Kennedy's treatment, the basis for an actable and convincing drama.

These characters do no more than walk upon the stage, take their places and say their say. There are a few simple and eloquent adventures for them to relate (not to act), and a liberal sprinkling of eloquent word imagery.

But the drama is static, and, being static, it naturally becomes heavy going before it is finished, when those who held and expanded their faith rode the fiery chariots threugh the gates of heaven.

The reading achieves a somber impressiveness, with Ian Maclaren, A. G. Andrews and Thaddeus Suski dividing honors in speech.

Carmen Mathews and Peter Cushing lightened the spirit briefly and Alan Handley and Leslie Bingham completed the cast.

"The Seventh Trumpet" is for the library. Not the theatre.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 22, 1941*

'The Seventh Trumpet,' Misty Allegory, Opens at the Mansfield Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A SERIES of mystic monologues, arranged in acts, called "The Seventh Trumpet" and written by Charles Rann Kennedy, was intoned last night at the Mansfield Theater by actors in costume. It was a strange, and on the whole rather alarming experience. Toward the end symbolism became acute, and the whole cast, less one member who had provided the only activity of the evening a few minutes earlier by shooting himself off-stage, was blown up by a Nazi bomb.

I have little hope of conveying the curious flavor of "The Seventh Trumpet," which played to an unruly and steadily diminishing audience. There are seven characters—a country bumpkin, a lad named Percival and known for short as "The Hero of Ludgate Hill," a nurse who loves Percival with an intensely spiritual love, an English monk, a monk of the Greek Orthodox Church who has had several visions, a Nazi aviator and a woman named Deborah who wasn't, so far as I could determine, anybody in particular.

During the first act most of these characters line up across the stage while one of them tells the story of his life. The story of each life is told fully in long sentences full of round words. The others listen, usually with their faces working. When one has finished, attention is diverted to the next. If he hesitates he is prompted. "Now tell me," the English monk says, "how did this beautiful friendship between you young people come about?" They tell him. "Oh, yes, Jackie and Willie," he says again. "What ever became of them?" Seems they turned out to be aviators.

During the second act precisely the same thing goes on, only not quite so fast. The speeches grow longer and more religious. The war is discussed in terms of Christ and Anti-Christ. Mr. Kennedy's prose, and his ideas, leave the earth. In the last act the Nazi aviator appears, repeats most of what has gone before to prove he heard it, tells the story of his life and says, at amazing length, that Hitler is Satan. The play, if we are to call it a play, is by then on a level of great solemnity and has become very difficult to understand—very difficult to listen to, if you come to that.

Throughout there are numerous, unintentionally comic anti-climaxes. It was wrong to laugh at them, of course, although most of us did. For here is earnestness and high intention and a sermon on the side of the angels. And what it comes to on the stage is appalling, incredible emptiness. It is beyond acting. Ian MacLaren, Peter Cushing, Carmen Mathews, A. G. Andrews, Alan Handley and the rest can only say the words or, in one or two cases, what they remember of the words. They say them good and loud.

"Walk Into My Parlor"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 21, 1941*

"Walk Into My Parlor," New Play at the Forrest Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

JUDGING from "Walk Into My Parlor," which opened at the Forrest Theatre last Wednesday evening, Alexander Greendale is a playwright of the Clifford Odets school. He is attempting to write an "Awake and Sing!" about a family of Italian-Americans living in Chicago. Fundamentally they are decent, honest, hard-working folk, but there is never enough money in the household to keep them in a manner to which they would like to become accustomed.

One of the sons, contemptuous of his father's fruit-vending business, has taken up cards, dice and counterfeit money as a means of livelihood and is therefore able to wear loud ties and snappy silk dressing gowns. His nefarious activities are tolerated by the rest of the family, until the mother of the house, sacrificing her lofty principles in the face of poverty, joins the counterfeiting gang to help distribute what is referred to in underworld circles, we understand, as "the queer."

When the upright father and one of his even more upright sons find out about mother's transgressions, the family is split wide open with dissension, while one of the daughters, an ardent trade unionist, hovers in the background humming songs of social significance.

Mr. Greendale, like Mr. Odets, is aware of the economic drawbacks of the capitalistic system, and feels that something should be done to make it possible for hard-working people to earn enough to live decently. He does not, however, indulge in the more blatant forms of soap-box oratory. His people are, for the most part, more inclined to follow a laissez-faire policy than to indorse the socially conscious daughter's Communistic preachments.

The author, who has obviously studied the works of Anton Chekhov as well as the more recent efforts of Mr. Odets, has a certain flair for character and a thoughtful approach to the serious business of living, but most of his dialogue is commonplace, even inept and silly at times, and the play in general lacks the luminous, exciting quality a more inspired dramatist might have given it. The people are not particularly interesting people, and the result is a pretty dull evening in the theatre enlivened now and then by some rather foolish comedy and a flamboyant dash of sex climaxed by a stormy love scene between Gino, the gambler son, and his brother's wife.

The company, made up for the most part of Italian-American players not previously seen on Broadway, acts earnestly but with no particular distinction, and Luther Greene, the producer, has directed the play with elaborate attention to detail, somewhat overdoing it in the case of the volatile Gino, whose irrepressible good spirits run to audacious leaping, pirouettes and eating live goldfish out of the bowl as an appetizer before supper.

"Walk Into My Parlor" is a well-meaning attempt to turn out something better than the routine drivel of the commercial play shops, but its author is not sufficiently adept to capture the interest of his audience more than a few moments at a time.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 20, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Walk Into My Parlor"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IF A man is going to be a professional playwright he has to begin somewhere. Alexander Greendale has begun with a slavish imitation of Clifford Odets's "Awake and Sing!" He calls it "Walk Into My Parlor," and it was put on at the Forrest last evening in a performance directed in imitation of the Group Theatre. Mr. Greendale is a young man in his middle twenties who won a $1,000 scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation-Dramatist Guild sweepstakes for enterprising playsmithies.

Since Mr. Odets often marks time by imitating himself, any one can tell Mr. Greendale that there is no future in imitation, particularly for a man who wants to develop an independent talent for the stage. And any one can tell him that the whirling gibberish that comes out of the corner of his mouth is bogus dialogue and it conveys nothing more substantial than swagger and strut.

* * *

But Mr. Greendale cannot be brushed off as lightly as that. For all its excesses, "Walk Into My Parlor" has a certain tautness and vitality that keep an audience listening to it, and it has a story that holds all the characters inside a dramatic scheme. Mr. Greendale is not writing about a Jewish family in the Bronx, but about an Italian family in Chicago. Papa Sarellis and his son, Salvatore, are trying with meager success to make a living by peddling fruit in a truck. Another son, Gino, is trying to make an easy living by passing counterfeit money. Since every member of the family is in urgent need of money, Mrs. Sarellis secretly takes part in Gino's racket to hold the family together. She fails, but that is Mr. Greendale's story, and it includes quite a lot of complications.

* * *

What you get is a nervously scrawled portrait of an Italian family fighting for existence in bewilderment and driven into false situations by intangible pressure from the outside. All the action occurs in a grubby, yet revealing living room designed by Paul Morrison, and Luther Greene has directed a carefully planned performance that looks like a junior Group Theatre job. As the petty racketeer, Nicholas Conte behaves like Elia Kazan, all impatience and roving restlessness, but he does it with enough impetuosity to make it his own.

The acting has a kind of drive that gives the play a vigorous shaking up. Duane McKinney as the honest brother, Rita Piazza as his smoldering wife, Rosina Galli as the audacious mother, Silvio Minciotti as the mournful father, Lou Polan as a frightened counterfeiter, Helen Waren as a sister working for labor union advancement and Joseph De Santis as her jobless husband hurry through the play on errands that Mr. Greendale and Mr. Greene have invented.

If the Experimental Theatre were keeping open house this season, "Walk Into My Parlor" would have the home life it deserves. It is not mature enough for Broadway. But this column has seen a number of mature whimsies this season that sounded more sophomoric than Mr. Greendale's first skyrocket. If he can imitate Mr. Odets as well as this, he might be able to imitate nature better.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 20, 1941

This Parlor Needs New Furniture

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ALEXANDER GREENDALE is obviously a sincere and earnest young playwright who has no desire to succeed as a slickster. All that is greatly in his favor. But he unfortunately has an appalling lot to learn in the theater; and, if such a thing is possible, even more to unlearn. He is at present completely punch drunk from his contacts with the starker side of the modern drama—chiefly Odets, but here and there O'Casey and even O'Neill. He is at present also at the stage where he strains too hard, gulps too deep, feels too throbbingly and attempts too much. He has tossed into his play every cliche of The Serious Drama that he could possibly lay his hands on; and what is even more discouraging, he has done so without an ounce of taste or a particle of humor. As a result, the glimpses of honest feeling that he provides are lost in a heavy fog of incompetence and pretension.

Walk Into My Parlor is a kind of Italianized *Awake and Sing*. It portrays an Italian-American family frustrated by poverty, and tells of the mother's efforts to keep the household together. These efforts take the extreme, but ineffectual, form of her joining one of her sons in the commerce of passing counterfeit money. The household is also wrecked by matrimonial disasters, by a brief flurry in incest, by the woes of a labor-organizing daughter whose husband turns scab; while between times the young counterfeiter keeps things in motion by kicking his brother in the slats, picking up live coals and dining off goldfish.

If all this, of itself, stands on the threshold of parody, it sometimes crosses it as a result of the author's dialogue. His dialogue combines that violence of metaphor he remembered in Odets with all the tough talk he could filch—and not too accurately—from the back rooms where gorillas hang out. The worst of such a melange is not that it is tasteless, but that it seems hopelessly forced and unreal, and thuds time after time into bathos.

The cast worked away at it all, and as the counterfeiter Nicholas Conte worked a good many hours overtime; but in the circumstances nobody could possibly distinguish himself.

"Walk Into My Parlor"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 21, 1941*

Mr. Greendale Shows Promise in Walk Into My Parlor

By JOHN MASON BROWN

THE author of Walk Into My Parlor, which opened at the Forrest on Wednesday night, is Alexander Greendale, a young man who in his first play seems determined to hold the mirror up to Odets. In particular, it is Awake and Sing that serves Mr. Greendale as his model. An Italian family in Chicago rather than a Jewish family in the Bronx is Mr. Greendale's concern. Even so, the oaths which all the members of this family speak prove to be no more than pale oaths of allegiance to Clifford Odets.

Mr. Odets, you will recall, turned to Isaiah's "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust" for the motto and point of his play. Mr. Greendale is unable to give dramatic statement to the whole quotation. He gets no further with the prophet's line than "ye that dwell in the dust."

* * *

His Italians are a hard-pushed lot. They are violent in their natures and their language. Life has used them meanly. They are poor, beaten and frustrated. It is the need of money which pinches their living, disrupts their home, breaks up their children's marriages and forces the old mother to join temporarily her racketeering son in his counterfeiting activities.

Their sufferings are recorded in a way that, though frankly imitative, is by no means devoid of all interest. If what is seen, heard and done in Walk Into My Parlor is palpably a copy of a copy, Mr. Greendale still shows signs of possessing a talent of his own.

His major sin is his youth; his youth which means that he has not as yet jelled as an author or been able to discard those "influences" to which all young writers are subject. It is this that makes him willing to hide his own light under whole bushel baskets of what he thinks to be Odets. But though he now functions frankly as a sedulous ape, there is a certain promise in his monkeyshines.

Mr. Greendale is unable to keep his play in focus. His dialogue is often so elliptical as to be mere nonsense. Although he mistakes gutterisms for vitality, and confusion for importance, he at any rate wants to look below the surface. His writing has the virtue of seeking to tell the whole truth; the submerged truth. At those rare moments when he looks up from Odets to survey life for himself his first work indicates that he may yet write an interesting play of his own.

Certainly Mr. Greendale can think up original things for his characters to do. The bad son in his Italian family is, for example, a young toughie who when he is not burning his hand with a red-hot coal to punish himself for having made love to his brother's pregnant wife is given to reaching into a nearby goldfish bowl and swallowing a live goldfish as easily as if it were a chocolate. Such casual antics, you must admit, do keep one's eyes riveted on the stage.

* * *

Considering how much Walk Into My Parlor owes to Mr. Odets, Luther Greene has had no other choice than to give it a production done in the Group Theatre manner. His actors are often good and act as if they understand what Mr. Greendale is up to. This in itself is something of a feat.

Rosina Galli is especially capable as the mother. So is Helen Waren as the daughter who is a strong union sympathizer. As the renegade son and goldfish swallower Nicholas Conte is admirable. In Italian terms he gives a performance of which either Burgess Meredith or Elia Kazan could be proud. He is unfettered, authoritative and dynamic. Only the play stands in his way. To him, alas, it proves as insurmountable an obstacle as Mr. Greendale's admiration for Odets does to Mr. Greendale as a young dramatist.

'WALK INTO MY PARLOR'

A play in three acts by Alexander Greendale; staged by Luther Greene; setting by Paul Morrison; presented at the Forrest Theatre on November 19, 1941, by Mr. Greene. The cast:

Theresa	Rosina Galli
Ilio	Silvio Minciotti
Salvatore	Duane McKinney
Carmella	Rita Piazza
Gino	Nicholas Conte
Grace	Helen Waren
Nick	Lou Polan
Luigi	Joseph De Santis
Rose	Hildegarde Halliday
Aurora	Rachel Millay
Dadish	Joseph Julian

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 21, 1941*

'Walk Into My Parlor' Opens at the Forrest

Rosina Galli and Nicholas Conte Appear in Play of Chicago's 'Little Italy'

By JOHN ANDERSON

ANGER is as good a reason as any for writing a play and better than most but unless it cools down to the level of coherence it's likely to result in messy playwriting. In "Walk Into My Parlor," which Luther Greene presented at the Forrest Theatre Wednesday night, Alexander Greendale seems so spurting mad that his play loses its effect and flails about like a furious windmill. It is so tense that the actors are on their feet practically all evening and that sort of thing often reminds an audience that it, too, can stand up and step out.

When Mr. Greendale learns to relax a little, gets his temperature down to a mere boiling point and forgets all about Mr. Odets he will doubtless justify the faith the Dramatists' Guild and the Rockefeller Foundation showed in him when they awarded him a fellowship.

For he is plainly a man of talent, which is indispensable, and a healthy social conscience, which often gives talent a fine cutting edge. In his first play, however, I feared that he would cut himself to pieces before he got control of his own weapons.

His fury is aimed at poverty, which is certainly a large subject but a prevalent one, and he examines it as it afflicts an Italian family in Chicago's "Little Italy." Papa Ilio is a gentle anarchist, who no longer fights; Mamma a domestic drudge with rebellious ideas of her own; Salvatore, an obedient and upright son; Gino, a smart rascal flashing through the world one jump ahead of the police.

Statement of Case

Though Mr. Greendale's statement of the case becomes a little confused, he is trying to contrast two attitudes towards economic slavery—the patient, hard-working acceptance of Papa Ilio and Salvatore, as opposed to the daring lawlessness of Gino and his bold mother who uses her gray hair and meek manner to avoid suspicion in circulating Gino's counterfeit money.

Mr. Greendale plainly disapproves of both attitudes, even if he does make the sinful members of the family more interesting than the others, and he doubtless expresses his own argument in the word of Grace, a realistic daughter of the family who says that the answer is in organization.

She recites with sardonic bitterness the nursery jingle about the spider and the fly as a picture of all such beaten families, and explains that the flies have merely to get together and kill the spider to solve their problems. As a human allegory it is singularly inept, for in the world of nature, spiders are immensely useful and flies a dangerous nuisance. But we needn't bother about that. The trouble is that Mr. Greendale's technique is not much better than his natural history. He lets Gino's lawlessness extend to loving his brother's wife, and further complicates the plot with wrangles between Grace and her scabbing husband.

He writes dialogue, some of it pretty rough, at the top of his voice, and keeps the play so roiled up and breathless that it never gets a chance to breathe.

His use of elliptical methods of dialogue, which Odets managed so superbly in "Awake and Sing," is carried to such an extreme that it becomes occasionally ridiculous and too cryptic to be dramatically useful. And he is guilty of a fortune telling scene that is painfully silly.

In spite of these defects, which make many of the scenes rather wearying, the play has flashes of great vitality and this quality is enhanced by some dynamic performances notably by Rosina Galli and Nicholas Conte. Mr. Conte presents a remarkable portrait of the worthless, dashing, desperate Gino. There is tremendous power behind the performance, and a tensile strength that seems to make the character move fascinatingly on steel springs. But, alas! Mr. Conte will probably be a prettied up Kodak star before Mr. Greendale can get another sheet of paper in his typewriter.

With such strident writing I doubt that a director could do much to modulate the performance or slacken the pace, though I wish Mr. Greene had brought eight chairs on the stage and made the whole cast sit down and count 20 every quarter of an hour. I think I wouldn't have felt so worn out, and they might have rested up.

It's dangerous when an author's anger causes the actors to have a rush of grease paint to the head.

"Walk Into My Parlor"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 21, 1941*

'Walk Into My Parlor' Explodes at the Forrest Theatre

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE Forrest Theater, redeemed from "Tobacco Road" after the lapse of a generation or so, was occupied Wednesday evening by a violent drama called "Walk Into My Parlor." This does not lighten the load of misery carried by the stage boards of the Forrest. The Sarellis of "Walk Into My Parlor" are just as miserable as the Lesters ever were. They live in Chicago, but they spit on the floor and the wall paper peels off and one of them eats live fish.

Alexander Greendale is the author of their tribulations. The Sarellis are impoverished Italians who address one another harshly in often cryptic slang. A son of the family is passing counterfeit money and falling lustily in love with his brother's wife. A daughter is separating from her husband because, while she is an ardent union worker, he has taken a non-union job. The father sells apples disconsolately and the mother, trying to give the family a lift, takes a hand in the counterfeit enterprise. The family falls apart throughout the play and in the end, although the parents are united and singing wistfully, one son is running from the police, the other has lost his wife's love without knowing it and the married children have finally parted on an issue of social significance.

These events mingle with violent physical encounters, ardent love-making and, at odd moments, fish-eating. At one point a character grabs a hot coal from the base-burner and holds it angrily in his hand, proving that he doesn't much like the idea of making love to this brother's wife. At all points the language is as violent as the action and the dialogue was frequently punctuated by gasps of hurt astonishment from members of the audience. "Walk Into My Parlor" is, in other words, an arrestingly bad play.

And it is not really a paradox to add that Mr. Greendale is by no means an author to be either laughed at or disregarded. Here he is all purposeless violence. Here he writes all in one key, achieving little more than vehement monotony, working with no sense of selection and without the skill to shape his unusually raw material.

But he is writing also with hard vigor and exceptional honesty. The characters in his play are not always comprehensible, but they are always alive and most of the time kicking. And though he may now and then remind you of Odets, he is very evidently his own man. "Walk Into My Parlor" is bad apprentice work, but Mr. Greendale is a likely apprentice.

The cast, which to a considerable degree comes from the Italian-American theatre, gives a vigorous account of itself. Nicholas Conte—who incidentally has a different background—is markedly effective as Gino, the fish-eater. Rosina Galli plays the role of the mother with intensity and perception.

The rest are equally successful in carrying out the author's intentions, even when his intentions are not entirely clear. In the turmoil of drama they keep their heads and, what is even more surprising, their voices to the end.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 20, 1941*

Life Is Tough for Italians In "Walk Into My Parlor"

"Walk Into My Parlor," drama by Alexander Greendale. Produced by Luther Greene at the Forrest Theatre, New York, Nov. 19, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THERE is as much concentrated and consistently good character acting in "Walk Into My Parlor" at the Forrest as you will find in any play in town. But it is largely wasted effort, because Alexander Greendale's play is a depressing affair.

It is the sort of play you would expect a young man who has won a couple of scholarships in playwrighting contests to produce during his test period. It is heavy with technique, pregnant with social purpose and not worth enough as entertainment to promote its sale.

Mr. Greendale, whose family name is probably more Latin than Anglo-Saxon, writes of an Italian family in Chicago that has a difficult time adjusting itself to the American way of life, even after it learns English.

An honest father, an honest son and a unionized sister-in-law are all for the family's reclamation. "We gotta live the right way, the clean way," sister-in-law preaches.

Devil Wins

But the bad ones and those who have become discouraged by a social system that denies them jobs at an encouraging wage, harken to the devil. Gino, mother's favorite, takes to what used to be known as "pushing the queer."

Mother, a sweet soul but weak, joins him in the hope that if she can get enough money together to insure the family's happiness they will all be willing to go straight and resume their worship of the saints. So mother goes in for counterfeiting, too.

Nothing much happens following this exposure of the family mess. Mr. Greendale and Luther Greene, his producer and director, have a nice feeling for detail.

Mr. Greendale also has considerable facility in writing the sort of dialogue that sounds too snappy to be true.

But there is nothing to their drama worth sitting up for. The conclusion is indeterminate and, as noted, on the depressing side.

An agile, graceful and carefully studied performance of the bad boy by Nicholas Conte, and sympathetic, gentle performances of the father and mother by Rosina Galli and Silvio Minciotti, are among the minor rewards of the evening.

Rita Piazzi, a flashing and adventurous type; Helen Waren, conservative and wholesome; Hildegarde Halliday, a radio daughter with a following; Duane McKinney and Lou Polan—these all stay well in character.

Nice acting. Nice direction. Nice setting by Paul Morrison. Nobody cares. Something wrong. Benito, the oil, please.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 20, 1941*

Home and Mother

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

AT LEAST, "Walk Into My Parlor" is the strangest drama that has come my way this season. On the surface it is merely another of those pseudo-Odets studies, this time about a rebellious Italian family in Chicago. As such it is a pretty dismal affair, despite its good heart and high intentions. It happens, however, to have certain curious qualities, which, although they certainly do not make it a good play, manage to make it an eccentric one. Told in a sort of oblique prose, with overtones of the back fence, it frequently succeeds in being strangely enigmatic as to just what the characters are up to or what they are talking about. Chiefly, however, it is the story of a valiant and homeloving mother who hit on the fine idea of saving her family by going in for a bit of counterfeiting on the side.

* * *

My favorite character, though, is the whimsical racketeering son, who introduces his mother to a life of passing bad money to unsuspecting tradesmen. A rather antic fellow, despite his serious side, he enlivens the moments of the drama when the plot is standing still by eating an occasional goldfish. Later, in a spirit of pleasantry, when he is about to seduce his brother's wife, he sticks his hand in the stove and pulls out a live coal. It was at approximately this time that the not unwilling wife looked at the near-by embers and began comparing them to tea leaves. You may likewise be interested in the author's studies in the American language, which seem to have convinced him that the verb, "glom," is a key word which can be used to mean virtually everything. If you took "glom" away from him, his character would have been almost inarticulate, which might not have been a bad idea.

* * *

Please do not let me give you the idea that "Walk Into My Parlor" is not a serious play. One of the Group Theater characters in the work is a girl labor union leader who finally convinces the family that social justice must be fought for by some less extravagant means than counterfeiting. This sound idea of hers is perhaps aided by the police, whose imminent arrival causes the goldfish-loving son to flee from home, accompanied by his family's blessings and the profits of the mother's extra-legal activities. As the curtain falls the old father is comforting the mother by singing to her an aria from "Rigoletto" or something. The writing of all this, I should add, is violent, juvenile and occasionally enlivened by a kind of cockeyed vigor. There is an effective performance in the manner of Elia Kazan by Nicholas Conte as the bad but presumably lovable son, while Miss Rosina Galli gives dignity to the role of the mother.

"Junior Miss"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 19, 1941*

'Junior Miss' Opens At Lyceum Theatre

Comedy Has as Its Central Character Girl of 13 with Movie Obsession

By JOHN ANDERSON

THE authors of "My Sister Eileen" have again raided the glossy pages of "The New Yorker" and have come back with more laughter for Broadway in a steadily amusing comedy called "Junior Miss" pieced together out of the stories of Sally Benson.

At the Lyceum, where Max Gordon presented the play last night, the authors appear as Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, instead of Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov as they are in the playbill of "My Sister Eileen," but in any order of precedence the boys are good, and their new play a welcome addition to the town's more innocent merriment.

One satisfying feature of the comedy, whose central character is a movie-infected girl of thirteen, is that it makes the bouncing adolescents of "Best Foot Forward" seem creaking veterans with the other foot in the grave. With the theatre thus creeping towards the cradle I anticipate a murder mystery among the teething set dealing, perhaps, with a poison rattle, that will make "Junior Miss" feel like a grandmother.

Teen Age Gaiety

To those cross-patches who are allergic to perambulator humor and the screech of 'teen age gaiety "Junior Miss" may well prove fatal. Its situations are homely, its parenthood strenuous and its plot obvious. Its chief fun stems from the sketches of a pair of youngsters whose minds have been warped by constant movie-going so that they can no longer tell reality from a Hollywood plot. They think of everything in terms of what happened to Myrna Loy, Gary Cooper, and Tyrone Power.

When one of them sees her father plant a paternal kiss on a young woman who is a friend of the family, her imagination, fired in the hothouses of kodak passion, leaps to the worst conclusion possible and practically brings the house down in the leap. One scheme to rescue her father from the supposed adventuress is nearly disastrous. It takes a couple of acts to straighten things out; the complications are entertaining, and the end happy enough to suit the wildest movie addict.

Expert Direction

Moss Hart, who has directed it expertly on a middle ground between a nursery romp and a family farce, has been equally shrewd in his casting. The young lady of the title who seems to be part screwball and part goon (if I understand goonhood correctly) is played with beaming hilarity by Patricia Peardon—a nice fat little girl in a nice fat part. Her dizzy conspirator is a floppy, crack-voiced youngster from the apartment downstairs played with a sort of wildly untidy perfection by Lenore Lonergan. When they get their whacky heads together the resident members of the human race take to the dugouts.

The adults in the cast are all pleasant young actors who, by comparison, seem to be doddering octogenarians. Philip Ober and Barbara Robbins play the parents of the junior miss with the right touches of parental gravity and suppressed mirth, not to say traces of justifiable alarm. Joan Newton plays a slightly older daughter with adolescent sophistication, and there are good performances by Francesca Bruning, Alexander Kirkland, Paula Laurence and Matt Briggs.

Altogether they make "Junior Miss" a skittishly entertaining cold-drama that is just the place for playgoers who are not frightened by the young.

'JUNIOR MISS'

A comedy in three acts, by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields; based on stories by Sally Benson; staged by Moss Hart; setting by Frederick Fox; presented at the Lyceum Theater on November 18, 1941, by Max Gordon.

The cast:

Harry Graves	Philip Ober
Joe	Kenneth Forbes
Grace Graves	Barbara Robbins
Hilda	Paula Laurence
Lois Graves	Joan Newton
Judy Graves	Patricia Peardon
Fuffy Adams	Lenore Lonergan
J. B. Curtis	Matt Briggs
Ellen Curtis	Francesca Bruning
Willis Reynolds	Alexander Kirkland
Barlow Adams	John Cushman
Western Union Boy	James Elliott
Merrill Feuerbach	Peter Scott
Sterling Brown	Robert Willey
Albert Kunody	Jack Manning
Tommy Arbuckle	Walter Collins
Charles	Jack Geer
Henry	John Hudson
Haskell Cummings	Billy Redfield

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 19, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Junior Miss"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOW that "Junior Miss" has arrived at the Lyceum, where it opened last evening, everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. For Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, who last season were writing "My Sister Eileen" out of the fecund pages of the New Yorker, have apparently renewed their subscription. After reading a series of Sally Benson's stories, they have come up with a life with father, mother, Lois, Judy and quite a number of other people, and it ought to make every one very happy, indeed.

For somehow it manages to capture the problem of living in the same house with two adolescent girls in just the proper mood of wonder and alarm. Lois Graves, who is trying hard to be a young lady, and Judy Graves, who has no difficulty in being a fat brat, are very nice children and a credit to their parents, who are very nice people, too. But there is no use denying that boys, parties, Christmas presents, movies and bosom friendships rock an apartment from side to side and keep parents standing on their ears.

• • •

To give the disorder of family life some semblance of order on the stage, Mr. Chodorov and Mr. Fields have concentrated on Judy's capacity for arranging other people's lives. She suspects that her father may be philandering with his employer's daughter, which seems on the whole to be a reasonable suspicion, and she suspects that her mother's brother has just done a ten-year stretch in jail. Putting together the tatters of a lot of movies she has seen, she decides to avert all sorts of calamities by making a match between the daughter and the uncle. It works like a charm until her father's employer hears about it and explodes violently in a number of directions. For a time it looks as though the Graves family were going to sustain a serious case of unemployment.

The story has to have a shim or two tucked under it to make the work come out even. Look on it more as carpentry than creation. But the story is sturdy enough to sustain a whole broadside of hilarious crises, confidences, quarrels and misunderstandings. As a matter of fact, the crises are commonplaces of life among the young. But the tone of "Junior Miss" makes the perfect humorous comment on everything that goes on. It is tolerant, without being sentimental. And the dialogue is bright, without being self-consciously clever. Now that the performance is over, it is hard to recollect a single brilliant line, but it is also impossible to recall a scene in which the talk is not buoyant and giddy and funny.

• • •

Mr. Chodorov and Mr. Fields have no greater enthusiasm for Miss Benson's stories than Moss Hart has for their play. He has staged it resourcefully and in high good humor. As the father and mother, Philip Ober and Barbara Robbins play with a style of affectionate enjoyment that represents the adult point of view toward the comedy. Joan Newton acts the part of the older sister with a smart and electric vitality that contrasts beautifully with the plump and childish extravagance of Patricia Peardon, who is acting the central part of the younger sister like an inspired bear-cub. Lenore Lonergan has so much actor's blood in her veins that she cannot help winning a roar for every line she speaks as a flouncing soul-mate from downstairs.

There is not a bad part or a dull performance in the lot. Alexander Kirkland and Francesca Brüning keep the romantic parts light-footed and attractive. Matt Briggs roars and blusters as the boss. As a servant girl with the general air of a casual derelict, Paula Laurence is immensely funny, and a whole scrimmage line of dazed young men tumbles in and out of the apartment as hurried suitors. There is a good setting of a room that is certainly lived in from Frederick Fox's interior decorating studio and drawing board.

"Junior Miss" is a harum-scarum antic and a darlin' play.

"Junior Miss"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 19, 1941*

'Junior Miss' Adds Life and Color to Adolescent Season

"Junior Miss," comedy by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields. Produced by Max Gordon at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, Nov. 18, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

BOOTH TARKINGTON would, I think, have been one with the cheering section at the Lyceum Theatre last evening. "Junior Miss" was there revealed as the best of the adolescent visitations of the season, and it is decidedly in the Tarkington tradition.

Penrod and the Baby Talk Lady are with us again, acting ever so much as older folk apparently like to believe they acted, or the neighbors' children acted, when they were young.

This provides pleasant fooling in the theatre, and occasionally a nice touch of family sentiment. But you know me. I'm the gruff old party who finds most adolescent comedy deliberately exaggerated by young actors and their directors.

I never have had real experience with but one adolescent, and with her friends. They, God be praised, have always seemed content to act their ages.

These have been quite sane and lovely ages, from doll days to engagement showers.

Sally's Sub-debs

But Sally Benson, who writes charmingly of the sub-debs of her acquaintance; and the Messrs. Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, who have combed the Benson sketches for "Junior Miss" material; and Bachelor Moss Hart, who has superintended the staging and told the children how he believes they might have acted under certain comedy circumstances—their experiences have been different than mine.

And they have discovered a smiling and lovable cherub to play the chief of their children in "Junior Miss." She is Patricia Peardon of the Navy Peardons and the March of Time. Masters, what a background!

Little Miss Peardon has herself a time in "Junior Miss." She plays Judy Graves, a 13-year-old who is saturated with movie experiences and sees life in terms of Tyrone Powers' adventures with secretaries and sarongs.

By jumping to hasty and highly colored conclusions she manages to involve the whole family in a variety of messes that are both comic and threatening.

Happy Ending

And, as all good comedy heroines should, she is able finally to straighten everything out and take the last curtain handsomely arrayed and thrillingly triumphant.

Not since Helen Hayes played the loveliest of all stage youngsters in "Dear Brutus," and the happiest of adolescent heroines in "Babs," has a young actress carried her author's scenes and play to so happy a finale. And I'm sure she is wise enough to take the news sensibly.

The support is good. Lenore Lonergan plays up beautifully to Patricia. Philip Ober and Barbara Robbins are as conservative parents as the situations permit. Alexander Kirkland and Francesca Bruning fill in with a pair of pleasant foils. Matt Briggs blusters enthusiastically, Joan Newton is a typical older sister and Paula Lawrence has the character maid assignment.

There is also a herd of young boys, including Jack Manning, Billy Redfield, Walter Collins, Peter Scott, Robert Willey, Jack Geer and John Cushman, who barge in on call.

The single set is attractive. Frederick Fox designed that.

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THEATRE REVIEWS

"Junior Miss"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 19, 1941*

Portrait of a Lady

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

YOUTH in its most beguiling aspects brings joy and gayety to the new play at the Lyceum Theater. Based on the stories that Sally Benson wrote about a nice thirteen-year-old problem child, "Junior Miss," the work of Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, who also dramatized "My Sister Eileen," comes to us as a delightful and winning little comedy of much charm and brightness. Although the dramatists might conceivably have found a happier plot upon which to hang their tale of the joys and sorrows of the young, such a minor deficiency seems of little importance as compared to the humorous but sympathetic attractiveness of their work. Then, as a special pleasure, there is a thoroughly enchanting performance in the title role by a lovely little actress named Patricia Peardon.

* * *

"Junior Miss," it might as well be noted at the start, is the fifth entertaining play to be based on stories in that eminent publication, "The New Yorker," the other four being "Life With Father," "My Sister Eileen," "Pal Joey" and "Mr. and Mrs. North." In its current manifestation, the story of poor Judy Graves, who always meant so well and was always getting herself and her family into so much trouble, is perhaps more sentimental than it seemed in Mrs. Benson's original tales. In truth, there are moments when it appears to be on the verge of growing too sentimental, just as its plot shows occasional signs of strain. Fortunately, on any such occasion, the bright humor, the friendly understanding and the amused compassion that have gone into the portrait of Judy, the year's most captivating heroine, comes to the fore, and happiness again reigns. Include among those who deserve credit for this excellence Moss Hart, who has directed it so well.

* * *

Decidedly "Junior Miss" is a glorification of the American youngster. Not only is it devoted to an amused, not too patronizing and entirely winning portrait of a delightful little girl and her friends of the teen years, but it has a frank and forthright way of pushing the elders of the cast into the obscurity of the background and keeping them there. The grown-ups of the narrative are pleasant enough people, but they are merely stage waits employed upon the rare occasions when the children are changing their clothes and perhaps taking a quick breath. The plot that concerns them all is hardly worth the mentioning here. It is merely something or other about how Judy, with her romantic imagination, cost her father his job and then won it back again. What is important is the creation of a living, breathing little girl called Judy; her funny, squeaky-voiced friend, Fuffy Adams; her first, bewildered boy friend and the strange, wonderful, frantic and difficult world in which they live.

* * *

Despite the play's virtues of sympathy and humor, the whole thing would have been a waste if the leading role were not perfectly cast and played. It was a stroke of fortune when young Miss Peardon was hit upon for the part. A thoroughly delightful young actress, just gawky enough, just blooming enough and just pretty enough, she is completely darling in the part, and in her last scene, looking freshly lovely in her first evening dress, she is a heroine of which any play should be proud. Here is quite a triumph, and Hollywood will probably take her right away from us. As her slightly overpowering friend, Miss Lenore Lonergan is admirably comic. The less grateful role of the elder sister is well handled by Miss Joan Newton, while the grown-ups, in their retiring fashion, are ably managed by Philip Ober, Miss Barbara Robbins, Miss Paula Lawrence, Matt Briggs, Miss Francesca Bruning and Alexander Kirkland. They certainly deserve a bow for their modesty. "Junior Miss" has a warming glow about it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 19, 1941*

'Junior Miss,' Comedy of Adolescence, Is Offered at the Lyceum

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JEROME CHODOROV and Joseph Fields, who happily discovered "My Sister Eileen" last season by running through some back numbers of the New Yorker, are not authors to let good source material down. Browsing again in the magazine's columns, they found Sally Benson's pleasant, perceptive stories about an adolescent and her family and, after making a few reasonably magic passes, came up with a bright, gay little comedy which they call "Junior Miss." "Junior Miss" opened last evening at the Lyceum.

They've picked and chosen from the stories, and added plot touches of their own. They, or Max Gordon in their behalf, have found plump little girls to act Judy and her friends, and odd and various boys to portray the "men" in the lives of Judy and her, oh, so much, much older sister, Lois. They have pictured, with sympathy and understanding, the plight of Judy's parents who may, for all I know, be all parents of little girls growing up in a haze of romance and motion picture dreams.

Judy and her bosom friend, Fuffy Adams of the cracking voice, see life as a pale reflection of the movie screen. Judy spins stories about her elders, turns her father's affectionate kissing of a pretty family friend into a desperate romance, converts an uncle's absence into a horrendous tale of crime and imprisonment. And Judy fixes things. She fixes her father out of a job, and her uncle into marriage, and almost brings down the roof. And then she puts the roof back up again, still in her dream world.

The authors have twisted their plot neatly and made it, thanks in part to some admirable acting by the elders in the company, into hilarity. But perhaps "Junior Miss," if not quite so funny, is most delightful when it is merely about Judy—about Judy and her first high heels and her first coat with real fur on the collar and her passionate devotion to food in any form. Then they give glimpses of the very young living the odd, brief life of youth amid adults who obviously don't understand very well, or ever quite appreciate how new and exciting things really are. Those more completely familiar with Miss Benson's stories than I can claim to be assure me that, or something like that, was the idea. Subtleties have broadened out at the Lyceum, and the laughter is louder. But the underlying quality shows through.

You can see the joints here and there and once or twice a rather anxious search for jokes. And the first act is somewhat desultory. But it is a tickling comedy, with appropriate serious relief, and all who have ever been children—especially girl children, of course—or parents are apt to find it a delightful one.

Patricia Peardon is a charming Judy, funny and attractive and natural, and as Fuffy Lenore Lonergan is as funny as youth, or anything else I can think of, could well be. Joan Newton is propertly hoity-toity as the elder sister. Philip Ober does a superior job as the badgered father, particularly when childish gayety assails his hangover; he and Barbara Robbins as the mother manage between them to high light both the humor and the authentic feeling of the play. Matt Briggs is amusingly explosive, and all the rest assist in keeping the evening gay.

Reprinted from NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM" *November 19, 1941*

'Junior Miss' Has a Gay Coming Out

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE town has a new hit. *Junior Miss* is a kind of reverse medallion to *Life with Father*—a Life with Daughter which gaily, warmly and sometimes hilariously celebrates modern, metropolitan, middle-class adolescence. Once again the *New Yorker*—which furnished the material for *Life with Father*, *My Sister Eileen* and *Pal Joey*—has fed our ailing theater and nourished it. Sally Benson's yarns about little Judy Graves and her uppity 16-year-old sister, Lois, and her inimitable "bosom friend," Fuffy Adams, have been picked over and rewoven without losing their spirit or their appeal.

Like *Life with Father*, *Junior Miss* gains tremendously from providing the kind of family picture to which an immense audience can respond. The familiarity of it, plus the sure-fire appeal of bright and highly imaginative youngsters at the brat stage, plus the freshness and humor of the treatment, easily make up for the play's wobbly scaffolding and its terrible nuisance of a plot.

The plot—to get rid of it fast—has to do with Judy's efforts to play Miss Fix-It in the family, and with her almost turning into a decided Miss Spoil-It. It drags in all kinds of grownups, of romantic folderol and of business transactions, and thus proves an obstruction as well as a bore; it keeps you from playing with the kids. And it's the kids who matter, with their movie-fed minds, their sophisticated lingo, their shuttling between an approach to "men" and a return to dolls, and all the things that go to make up their lives and the lives of thousands like them: the first high-heeled shoes, the first dance, the condescension of 16 toward 13 and the defensive scorn of 13 for 16; the procession of youths-brash, gangling, tongue-tied, man-of-the-world—who file in and out of the Graves apartment. All this is delightful. Best of all, the three very young ladies of *Junior Miss* are nicely differentiated, with, I'm afraid, the poised and frog-voiced Fuffy taking first honors.

That is largely owing, no doubt, to Lenore Lonergan's enormously funny and accomplished performance in the role, which it is easier (or at any rate simpler) to praise than to describe. If Patricia Peardon's Judy suffers by comparison, it is certainly winning and skilful in its own right. As the more ladylike Lois, Joan Newton has to strain a bit to keep in the running with the terribly high-spirited kids. As the parents, Philip Ober and Barbara Robbins are in the even worse position of having to "feed" the youngsters throughout, but though they are denied the spotlight each gives a thoroughly pleasant and convincing performance.

"Junior Miss"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 19, 1941*

Junior Miss Transports Stories Of Sally Benson to the Stage

By JOHN MASON BROWN

BROADWAY, which already stands in The New Yorker's debt for the sketches from which such successes as Pal Joey, Mr. and Mrs. North, My Sister Eileen, Having a Wonderful Time and Life with Father have been derived, turned to that delightful magazine once again last night for what should be another success.

This time it is Sally Benson's charming stories about the home life of the Gravseses which have served as the basis of a play. Properly enough, it is the same Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields who, under the same Max Gordon's management, were responsible for the dramatization of My Sister Eileen, have transferred Junior Miss from the inkwell to the makeup box. And the result is on the whole a very pleasant, heart-warming evening.

The Graveses, you must remember, if you were self-indulgent enough to read Miss Benson's vignettes were two average parents whose fortunate misfortune it was to have two daughters. One of these was a subdeb sophisticate named Lois. The other was Judy, an irrepressible child at the bulky age, with an overdeveloped imagination. Judy's bosom friend was Fuffy, that young maiden, once encountered, that no one is likely to forget.

* * *

With a brilliant mastery of her medium and infinite gentle humor, Miss Benson told about the impact of Judy and Lois both on their parents and on each other while on a family automobile trip, when trying to mother a mouse, at Christmas time when childhood would out, at the moment of writing a diary for homework, when making New Year's resolutions, acting in an amateur production of The Tempest or going to a first party.

Miss Benson's writing was as quiet as it was perceptive. Her sketches were incidents observed with a fine eye for detail. Their plot was no more than everyone's experiences who has ever had a daughter, a sister or a niece. The only climaxes in Miss Benson's sketches were the constant, jabbing truths which they managed to get stated. These, and what was at once touching and gay in their humor.

It is here that the Messrs. Chodorov and Fields appear upon the scene, disguised as so many Guy Fawkeses. They come bearing a plot, a regulation theater plot. They are the conspirators whose duty it has been to plant the gunpowder of action in these quiet sketches. This they have proceeded to do. And their task, though ingeniously executed from the point of view of giving continuity to Miss Benson's separate incidents, has not been an easy one.

If Mr. Chodorov's and Mr. Fields' story is no masterpiece, it is at least serviceable enough. Like Santa Claus, one has to accept it on faith. Yet like Santa Claus it comes bearing gifts, even if in this case these gifts prove mostly to be Miss Benson's.

Although the Junior Miss that Mr. Gordon has presented is much more underscored and gagged than was the Junior Miss which Random House published, it can still boast its richly entertaining, often dissolving stretches. If its plot, which forces little Judy to function as a cupid who first loses her father his job and then regains it for him, is something that you had best not bother about, the resulting play is nonetheless a genuinely rewarding one.

* * *

The evening is very much the children's. The parents fare as badly as only parents can. So do their grownup friends. The Graveses' apartment is their daughters' castle. And such agreeable performers as Philip Ober, Barbara Robbins, Francesca Bruning and Alexander Kirkland have to wait upon the young. This they do with admirable patience. But the young in Moss Hart's capable production prove well worth waiting upon, even when (parentally enough) you feel like killing them.

Joan Newton is a subdeb at once self-righteous and knowing, Patricia Peardon is amazingly skillful and poised as Judy with the movie-soaked mind. And Lenore Lonergan, whose voice is a bleat filled with comic music, is wonderfully funny as her friend Fuffy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 19, 1941*

"Junior Miss," by the Authors of "My Sister Eileen," at the Lyceum

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE business of running up little comedies based on stories from the New Yorker is fast becoming one of our major industries. Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, who dramatized Ruth McKenney's "My Sister Eileen" sketches, originally printed in that magazine, have now fallen upon Sally Benson's "Junior Miss" series with shrill ecstatic cries. The result of their labors was revealed last night at the Lyceum Theatre.

This reporter happened to attend "My Sister Eileen" some weeks after its opening night last winter, and was surprised to find it an anemic comedy outfitted with funny stage business mostly supplied, according to report, by the director, George S. Kaufman, and aided enormously by the irresistibly comic performances of Shirley Booth and Morris Carnovsky. At no time, however, were we overcome with mirth to the extent of rolling inelegantly in the aisle.

After seeing "Junior Miss," out of the same factory, last night, we are beginning to wonder if perhaps we weren't inclined to underestimate the charms of "My Sister Eileen."

Two Thirteen-Year-Olds

Miss Benson's stories about Judy Graves, a dashing thirteen-year-old, and her pal, Fuffy Adams from downstairs, must have been amusing sketches. Not having read them, we are in no position to report just how faithfully the Messrs. Chodorov and Fields have reproduced the original characters. We are, however, in a position to state that "Junior Miss" is a surprisingly poor piece of play writing, decidedly below par as Broadway standards go, and that Moss Hart, the stage director, has sometimes rendered this distressing fact more obvious by his frantic attempts to cover it up.

The ingredients that go to make a comedy of family life are all too familiar to anybody who gets around Broadway these evenings, and they are all there in "Junior Miss," with the emphasis on several budding young ladies and their callow boy friends. The juveniles who visit the Graves flat come near to being the most amusing characters in the play, and it is significant that none of them is seen often or for very long at a time.

There is a self-conscious calculated quality about much of the humor in "Junior Miss" that made it hard for us to laugh as long or as loud as we desperately wanted to last night. The performance lacked spontaneity to an alarming degree. It was almost as if the entire company were whispering asides to the audience: "This one will slay you!" . . . "Just wait 'til you see what happens now!" and then proceeding to act out another cute prank thought up by those cards, the Junior Misses.

A Self-Conscious Company

Consequently, although we found young Patricia Peardon a delightful little person as Judy, and her friend, Fuffy, sometimes hilarious in the person of Lenore Lonergan, who can emit sounds resembling the whistle of an excited freight train, they wore us down after a while. Both Miss Peardon and Miss Lonergan are terribly, terribly certain that what they are doing and saying is a perfect scream, and their elders in the company play up to them with the mechanical indulgence of animal trainers showing off a couple of clever and beguiling seals.

Of the adults in the cast, only Philip Ober as Judy's long-suffering father seemed at all successful in making any sort of character out of his role, but we must admit none of them had much help either from playwrights or director. Paula Laurence, a dead-pan comic, had her funny moments as a maid who came out of the kitchen now and then for a bit of vaudeville, and as we said before, the youths who called on Judy's older sister, and the young man who came to take Judy herself to the dance, were all amusing adolescents.

As a whole, "Junior Miss" is a disjointed, slap-dash affair resting heavily on the dead certainty that audiences in general dote on cute kids and that Miss Peardon and Miss Lonergan are undoubtedly two of the cutest to be found in the theatre today. Their youthful charm, combined with some of the chatter carried over, presumably, from Miss Benson's stories, are almost certain to make "Junior Miss" a Broadway success. It is not, however, a piece of theatrical craftsmanship of which anybody need be particularly proud.

"Ring Around Elizabeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 18, 1941*

Premiere of 'Ring Around Elizabeth'

Jane Cowl Plays Small Town Housewife in Comedy by Charl Armstrong

By JOHN ANDERSON

JANE COWL is to be seen at the Playhouse as a small town housewife who pretends to have amnesia and forget her family, a dandy scheme which would have been even better if she had also forgotten her lines, or to come to the theatre. For the play by Charl Armstrong, called "Ring Around Elizabeth," is a foolish little comedy that begins with a patter of inept humor and turns into a steady drizzle of boredom. What Miss Cowl could see in it besides herself is a problem that I hereby leave among the great Broadway mysteries.

For one thing I find it difficult to imagine the Great Jane playing an unhappy wife and mother, presiding over a dingy domestic brawl, and on speaking terms with the cook.

I like to think of her pushing her way through jewels and orchids to see where the audience is, or sweeping down a double-deck staircase in an ermine train so long that the other end has to be parked outside the theatre, and having all the male members of the cast faint at the sight of her radiance.

But poor Betty Styles at the Playhouse hasn't even a train of memory. She is so distracted by one daughter's adolescent love twinges, the younger daughter's tantrums, her own mother's vapors, and her father-in-law's annoying hobbies, that she goes out of the house one day to get $1,500 she has inherited and comes back with a bank roll and a vacant look in her eye.

For the life of her she can't remember a thing about any of them, a peculiar state of affairs which seemed to interest the other members of the cast if not the audience.

Fatal Error

The authors of wishy-washy family plays such as this and last week's "The Walrus and the Carpenter" commit a fatal error when they blandly assume that a family is any funnier than its members. The fact that the characters are supposed to be related does make quarreling easier, but it doesn't make the quarrel itself any more entertaining than if it occurred among total strangers.

In fact the present author's scheme for having an exasperated housewife treat her relatives as if they were total strangers might make an amusing comedy but "Ring Around Elizabeth" isn't it.

The forgetful Elizabeth tells them all a few hard truths, has a flirtation with her own daughter's boy friend (since she has forgotten twenty years off her life) and winds up by learning a few things about herself to live happily ever after. She learns also, if I can trust my ears, that "Life is a web we weave to hold the things we love closer together," and similar rough talk.

Miss Cowl's Role

Miss Cowl plays all this for what it deserves which is approximately nothing. Instead of the lacquered style of her best playing she portrayed Elizabeth in a slapdash manner which, if it was to be taken as her comment on the play, suggested that she was no more interested in it than I was.

A number of the parts have been cast with the same haphazard effect, so that characters that should have seemed merely cranky turned unpleasant. Mr. Schorr's direction makes matters worse by leaving the play a general sprawl of loose ends, strident scenes, and unamusing racket, in which even such players as McKay Morris and Barry Sullivan seemed hopelessly trapped.

Mr. Sovey's single setting of a comfortable living room seemed most attractive in spite of its tenants, and the fact that it is littered up with badly chipped dialogue.

'RING AROUND ELIZABETH'

A play in three acts by Charl Armstrong; directed by William Schorr; setting by Raymond Sovey; presented at the playhouse on November 17, 1941, by Allen Boretz and Mr. Schorr, in association with Alfred Bloomingdale.

The cast:

Laurette Carpenter Styles	Katherine Emmett
Hubert Cherry	Herbert Yost
Mercedes	Marilyn Erskine
Vida	Ruth Chorpenning
Jennifer	Katharine Bard
Elizabeth Cherry	Jane Cowl
Irene Oliver	Diantha Pattison
Harriet Gilpin	Lea Penman
Ralph Cherry	McKay Morris
Andy Blayne	Barry Sullivan
Policeman	Gilbert O. Herman
Dr. Hollister	Edwin Cooper

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 18, 1941*

Wife in Revolt

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

MISS COWL, the long-suffering housewife, turns on the spoiled members of her family and puts them in their place for three long acts in the new comedy at the Playhouse. Since she has a biting tongue and a merrily scornful manner, it really doesn't take her long to put her tormentors to complete rout and, therefore, her vehicle, "Ring Around Elizabeth," must do a lot of marking time to keep such a simple little plot in evidence for an entire evening. Perhaps this is one reason why the new work seems so mild and minor. Whatever the causes may be, the play by Charl Armstrong, of which the advance reports had been excellent, proves to be one of the most unexciting events of the current season.

* * *

Any play in which a downtrodden hero or heroine finally stands up with fine determination and gives the bullies of the cast just what is coming to them is bound to have a certain inescapable audience value. Here the situation is just the sort of thing that might delight the feminine spectators if they were not too demanding in their taste. For the heroine is truly a long-suffering lady and she is surrounded by unpleasant relatives of three generations who are threatening to make hers a life of drudgery. Determined to escape from their tyranny, she finally pretends that she is suffering from amnesia and that she knows none of them and dislikes them all. Soon she has won her daughter's sweetheart from her, has told her husband what she thinks of him and has the entire family at her feet. This, I fear, is a minor triumph.

* * *

All of this, as I say, might well have made for a pleasant enough minor comedy, since all of the audience sentiments are on its side. In addition, the playwright has managed to set down a few amusing observations of family life and one or two entertaining remarks, as well as to give the disagreeable members of the family a certain horrid semblance of life. One trouble that the dramatist faced, though, is that it takes great talent to put dull and irritating people on the stage and not make the scenes in which they appear dull and irritating. Miss Armstrong is not one of the proud possessors of such a skill. Then, too, she lacks the deftness and the wit necessary to keep so tenuous a comedy going, and it proceeds to sag unhappily. As a final defect, the play is highly uninventive in the manipulation of her plot and her prose style.

* * *

As the turning lady, Miss Cowl gives a lively, vigorous and rather too mannered performance. Under rather tentative direction, the other players are not always to be found performing with the deftness that might have given their play the lift that it gravely needs. Nevertheless, Miss Katharine Bard is straight-forward and earnest as the older daughter, Miss Marilyn Erskine is more than sufficiently disagreeable as the particularly unpleasant younger child, Barry Sullivan is given to all the roguishness the author could have desired as a young adventurer, and McKay Morris gives another performance of McKay Morris as the husband. "Ring Around Elizabeth" is a dull and disappointing comedy which makes a determined effort to capture the feminine trade.

"Ring Around Elizabeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 18, 1941*

Jane Cowl Acquires Furious Comedy About a Mother

"Ring Around Elizabeth," comedy by Charl Armstrong. Produced by Allen Boretz and William Schorr, in association with Alfred Bloomingdale at the Playhouse, New York, Nov. 17, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE idea in "Ring Around Elizabeth" at the Playhouse is that mother can't rest. The family makes a squirrel cage of her home until she breaks out hysterically and adopts amnesia as a refuge.

With a faked loss of memory, and the help of the playwright, Charl Armstrong, mother is able to establish a new set of values at home and things are more promising at the play's end than at its beginning.

I am afraid someone talked Jane Cowl into this one. It is definitely below her average, both as play and vehicle. She, as one of the finer and more intelligent of America's comediennes, has no business wasting her mind and her talents on such artificial stuff.

Tell her that, however, and she will quite reasonably suggest that perhaps you, being so smart, can find her a better play.

Perhaps in time Dwight Deere Wiman, who still holds an option on her services, following last season's run of "Old Acquaintance," will do that very thing. I hope so.

Mother's Way Out

Meantime Miss Cowl is giving everything she has in the way of energy to the saving of "Ring Around Elizabeth."

Her family in this simple domestic opus is one of those devastating groups in which each member is furiously intent on proving that he or she is frightfully different.

Her husband is a furious fisherman. Her oldest daughter is a furious adolescent pursuing romance. Her youngest daughter is a High School prig majoring furiously in biology, or chemistry, or something.

Her maid is a furious retainer threatening to quit whenever there is nothing else to laugh at. Her in-laws are furiously irritating.

Furiouser and Furiouser

Miss Cowl is furiously amusing the first or second fifteen minutes, trying to out-shout and out-nerve this bedlam. But she runs down with the play, and that isn't all her fault.

She has her best support from McKay Morris, unhappily cast as the dull husband, but doing his best to recover; Barry Sullivan, playing a volatile boatman, and Marilyn Erskine, a child in years but an understanding actress none the less.

The others have been made pretty self-conscious, it seemed to me, by the furious direction of William Schorr, co-producer with Allen Boretz and the adventuring Alfred Bloomingdale.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 18, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Ring Around Elizabeth"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHAT is Jane Cowl's bad luck is our misfortune. In point of fact, it is "Ring Around Elizabeth," which was acted like a cage of flying squirrels at The Playhouse last evening. It is a misguided comedy that Charl Armstrong, author of "The Happiest Days," has written from the woman's angle—full of homey touches and roguishness. Miss Cowl appears to be satisfied with it. After giving a distinguished performance in "Old Acquaintance" last season, she attacks the fiddle-faddle of "Ring Around Elizabeth" with the gusto of a woman who is having a grand time.

• • •

She makes a breathless entrance through a door that seems to have been swung open by one of the ghosts in "Blithe Spirit" and comes rushing into the living room carrying prop packages. Cast as the self-sacrificing center of an unappreciative family, she acts like a steam-engine all evening, throwing gestures around freely, jumping up and down with great energy, thinking and pondering with nervous concentration when she is on the stage alone and registering every point as vehemently as though she were going to vote a straight ticket.

• • •

Acting as volatile as hers is wonderfully enlivening when it is applied to a good part in an intelligent play. But her part in "Ring Around Elizabeth" is ready-made out of some of the theatre's mustiest materials. Elizabeth is the generous, patient, wise, noble, humble, cheerful cornerstone of a selfish family. Every one takes Elizabeth for granted and imposes on her. To escape from the complex situation into which married life has thrust her, she pretends to have amnesia. Suddenly every one realizes how essential Elizabeth has become. They wait on her. They woo her. They praise her. They all but enshrine her. Behind the mask of her feigned amnesia she has an opportunity to tell some wholesale personal truths about her family that astonish and instruct them. Everything she does is for their good, and works out for her own good, also. It is so easy that it is depressing.

• • •

Since "Ring Around Elizabeth" is a stock play, no one should be surprised to discover that the acting is like Monday night in a stock company. All the players are constantly in a hurry, and they act like a society of rugged individualists. McKay Morris plays the sorrow stricken husband and father with the human touch. Katherine Emmet, Diantha Pattison, Katharine Bard, Marilyn Erskine, Barry Sullivan, Herbert Yost and the others are sound of limb and wind, and Miss Cowl holds them all at bay.

After seeing a performance of "Ring Around Elizabeth" we all know the derivation of family jar.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 18, 1941

Go Away Now . . . Ma's Got Amnesia

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

JANE COWL has come to town in a little comedy that drifts for awhile, then droops and finally drags itself across what seems like a limitless expanse of third act. There is an old but serviceable idea behind it that might have grown up into a play, but the author proved more of a doting than an understanding parent. Nor has Miss Cowl, for all her unconquerable vitality, proved quite enough of a watering-pot for Mr. Armstrong's sensitive plant. All in all, *Ring Around Elizabeth* must be voted a long-winded trifle.

It presents Miss Cowl as the hard-taxed center of an irritating household. Her husband is a dullard; one of her daughters is hysterically in love with a cynical playboy; the other is very stridently precocious. There's a selfish mother who hoards antiques and a fussy father-in-law who chases fires, and a nosey house guest and a bossy cook. And most of these people are worse than usual because they're panting after a legacy that Elizabeth has received.

Having reached the breaking point, Elizabeth contracts a nice case of amnesia, in which 20 years are blotted out and she is a girl again. This enables her not only to indulge in caprices like taking up with her daughter's young man, but also to tell all the members of the family what she thinks of them. Beyond this point Miss Armstrong has failed to arm herself in the way of a plot except to have people keep on doing—I forget how many times—what they have already done.

But the damage had been done much earlier. Though one pitied Elizabeth's plight (after all, one was sharing it), she had very little glamor and turned out to be very little fun. Though one grasped at her amnesia as at a straw, it turned out to be just another form of whimsy. It was all merely one more case of The Revolt of Mother, this time prolonged from a crisis into a kind of permanent career.

The production did not much enhance the play. Mr. Schorr's direction was strenuous, yet lifeless; and though Miss Cowl went at her part with plenty of gusto, she gave it almost no comic force. McKay Morris made a good-enough husband, Diantha Pattison a good-enough house guest and Marilyn Erskine a good-enough adolescent. The others, I suppose, were bogged down by their parts. Raymond Sovey's set was much the most cheerful thing in the play.

"Ring Around Elizabeth"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 18, 1941*

'Ring Around Elizabeth,' With Jane Cowl, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IN "Ring Around Elizabeth," which opened last evening at the Playhouse, Miss Jane Cowl plays rings around an author, one Charl Armstrong. While comedy stumbles and drama plods, Miss Cowl dances nimbly, displaying buoyant charm and professional dexterity and revealing also that she is not to be frightened by a playwright's mediocrity. "Ring Around Elizabeth" is routine stuff, certainly, but Miss Cowl can rise above it.

This represents the establishment of no new record for altitude. A slight hop would put any good actress above "Ring Around Elizabeth," which sets upon a hillock of an idea and levels it utterly, leaving only scattered chunks of rough-quarried dialogue to mark its resting place. And I suppose that any actress who reads scripts hurriedly might be tempted by the part to which Miss Cowl has momentarily dedicated her talents.

She plays the harried mother of a brawling family. Her husband brays about the laundry. He own mother whines and meddles. One of her daughters storms at interference with her ill-advised love life and the other wants to take $1,500 mamma is about to inherit and go to Chicago to practice science. The put-upon lady's father-in-law has a fire alarm bell in the living room and her cook is an unpolished jewel who sings noisily as she answers the telephone. It is finally too much for the lady to bear, as it has been for a full act too much for the audience to bear. She achieves amnesia, a relief denied the customers.

The two subsequent acts show her ostensibly bereft of memory, and meeting all her emotional dependents as if for the first time and caustically. There is some fun in this, chiefly because of Miss Cowl's skimming method. (And now and then the author hits the rim of the target, as any author is bound to who uses a scatter-gun long enough.) The last act finds the lady about to embark on a long boat ride with a relatively strange man, she having gone too far with her little joke, and relapses into sentiment.

The idea is probably only fair, but it glitters when compared with the execution. The author writes with a kind of stubborn obviousness and contrives with a depressing lack of invention. The dialogue is without flavor, and is written to be spoken at the top of the voice.

McKay Morris fills in his part with broad, heavy strokes; Katharine Bard plays hers in a series of pretty swoops about the stage. Little Marilyn Erskine is often amusing, however, and Herbert Yost is sprightly and astringent. Several of the others assist Miss Cowl in her attempt on the impossible.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *November 18, 1941*

Jane Cowl Is Presented In Ring Around Elizabeth

By JOHN MASON BROWN

AS THE harassed mother in Ring Around Elizabeth, Jane Cowl is supposed to suffer from amnesia. Her malady, though in this case allegedly comic, filled me with envy. Loss of memory, especially when described as a fugitive ego, was the one fate I kept hoping would be mine during the course of a dreary evening.

Miss Cowl is, of course, Elizabeth at the Playhouse. Andy Gump would not be surprised by this. And Elizabeth, if you must know (though I can't really figure out why you should care), is a mother; a mother who, by a well-timed attack of amnesia, succeeds in regaining her freedom and her individuality after having been kicked about for 19 long years by the eccentric members of her selfish family.

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Elizabeth's household is all alarums and excursions but not enough exeunt omnes. Her two daughters take their mother for granted and one of them is a brat. Her mother is a leech. Her husband is an inconsiderate dullard. Her maid is an unruly domestic who would have been liquidated by the comrades in the first days of Russia's revolution. Miss Cowl is the worm who turns; the parent who, needless to say, at last speaks some ugly truths, steals her elder daughter's beau and toys for a while with the idea of traveling with him on a boat of her buying to the tropics. Her old father-in-law, the fire addict, who owns a special short-wave radio, is the luckiest person on or off the stage. He wears earphones throughout the whole uncomic caterwauling.

If one excepts McKay Morris who is agreeable enough as the stodgy husband, and Katharine Bard who is very pleasant as the elder daughter, all the others act Charl Armstrong's attempt at comedy with the subiety of a congress of sledge-hammers.

* * *

Miss Cowl is one of the worst offenders. Although she can be, and usually is, a brilliant, beautiful and beguiling performer, she is anything but this in Ring Around Elizabeth. She gives every sign of knowing just how desperate the comedy is. Without a controlling director, she is all over the place. Stephen Leacock's solitary horseman who rode off furiously in all directions seems as stationary as the Goddess of Liberty compared with Miss Cowl. She overworks uncomfortably. She sniffles her comic lines, waves her hands until our wrists ache, jolts forward for the sake of laughter like a badly driven car, sends the predicates in her sentences sliding downhill and is cuter than even deliberate cuteness has the right to be.

It's all immeasurably melancholy, this play born with a Cowl, and not the real one. Embarrassing, too. In the interest of any charity beginning in her home, Ring Around Elizabeth had best be forgotten.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 18, 1941*

Jane Cowl as a Harassed Mother In "Ring Around Elizabeth"

By WILELLA WALDORF

JANE COWL arrived at the Playhouse last night in a confused and noisy comedy called "Ring Around Elizabeth" that exhausted this reporter very thoroughly before the evening was over. After three strenuous acts, however, Miss Cowl herself was still brimming with energy and good spirits at the final curtain. As the mother of a violently obnoxious family, given to screaming when they wanted something, and tantrums when they didn't get it, she pretended to be an amnesia victim in order to bring them all to their senses.

Unfortunately this proved to be a very slow process, involving an unconventional young man named Andy Blayne, about to embark for the West Indies in a schooner, or was it a yawl? It looked for a time as if Elizabeth might go with him, but of course she didn't. Precisely why she didn't was not clear. We should say probably because it is easier to sell the movie rights when husband and wife are reunited at the final curtain.

Ordinarily Miss Cowl is one of this department's favorite performers and we enjoy all of the merry little Cowl tricks. Last night, however, she seemed to be working a bit too hard trying to put over a vapid play. Then, too, it was difficult to sympathize with her predicament. Faced with a family such as Elizabeth's, an attack of amnesia seemed a futile gesture at best. Obviously as soon as her memory conveniently returned, the whole crew would promptly revert to their old tactics. Elderberry wine laced with arsenic would have been more quicker and more decisive.

Among those who strained their vocal cords in support of the star were Marilyn Erskine, remembered as the brat who was so delightfully profane in "The Primrose Path," now grown into a high school scientific genius; Katharine Bard as an emotional elder daughter, McKay Morris as a not too understanding husband, Herbert Yost as grandpa playing with fire gongs, Katherine Emmett as a self-pitying grandma, Ruth Chorpenning as a maid given to choir singing and quitting, and Lea Penman as a snobbish neighbor.

Diantha Pattison as a college friend visiting in the house had a quiet, serene way about her that was soothing in the midst of the turmoil, nor was Barry Sullivan as the unconventional young man bound for the West Indies called upon to lift his voice unduly.

"Ring Around Elizabeth" is much too hackneyed and too trivial for Jane Cowl to be wasting her talents on.

"Little Dark Horse"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 17, 1941*

Race Issue

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE simply hilarious topic of miscegenation and its results is the subject of the merry little antic called "Little Dark Horse," at the John Golden Theater. Adapted by Theresa Helburn from a comedy by the French Andre Birabeau, the new play treats with much cuteness of the consequences of the visit to the Monfavet family of a little Negro boy who happens to be the son of M. Monfavet. It is my suspicion that none of us is quite lofty enough to find good clean fun in any such inter-racial matter, but, even if we were, it would be difficult to discern merit in the dull and humorless work that the dramatist and the adoptor have provided between them. Why Miss Helburn was interested in the first place it would be impossible to say.

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Give the play credit for properly elevated thoughts on the issue it brings up. The white children of the family take to their black half-brother immediately and are not disturbed by any racial prejudice. The older Monfavets try to look at the problem understandingly and the mother of the child's father eventually agrees to adopt the boy. Even the gossiping villagers are admirably tolerant. There can be no doubt that the French are more progressive in these matters than we, though it is probable that only the Russians could boast that the topic of the play would be without serious meaning for them. The trouble with "Little Dark Horse," though, is not that its subject is locally too painful for dramatic consumption, but that its humor is so feeble, its interest so lagging and its entire narrative so fabulously dull.

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As is almost invariably the case these days, the acting is vastly superior to the play. Miss Cecilia Loftus sagely declines to show a great deal of interest in her role of a domineering grandmother, but Walter Slezak is amusing as a bullied bachelor, Grant Mills plays the errant father sanely, Miss Leona Powers strives to make a character of the highly uninteresting wife, Rolfe Sedan tries his best to be comic as a doctor who needs more curing than his patients, and Miss Ann Mason is excellent as the more understanding of the grandmothers. And the children are charming. Raymond Roe, Edmond Abel and an extremely pretty girl named Anita Magee play the white offspring with genuine attractiveness, and R. V. Whitaker is completely delightful as the little Negro boy. The trouble is that all of them are bogged down in an awful comedy.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 17, 1941*

'Little Dark Horse' Adapted by Theresa Helburn From the French of Andre Birabeau

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ANDRE BIRABEAU has a mind that might be described as provocative. In "Dame Nature," which was presented here three years ago, he discussed the dilemma of an adolescent boy and girl who, much to their astonishment, had become parents. "Little Dark Horse," which was put on at the John Golden last evening, carves a deeper notch on the bar sinister. It describes the dilemma of a French family man who is also the parent of a colored boy. Theresa Helburn, high priestess of the Theatre Guild, has adapted Mr. Birabeau's play, and Cecilia Loftus and Walter Slezak are appearing in it.

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In "Dame Nature" Mr. Birabeau was writing with pity as well as comedy; and although the theme was odd his treatment of it justified his choice. But "Little Dark Horse," or at any rate the version offered here, is a comedy for guffawing. Excepting a straightforward scene or two between the illegitimate colored boy and the three legitimate white children of the same father, the new comedy is engrossed in the huge joke of passing an unwelcome child around from one person to another and trying to get him out of sight. Last evening's audience seemed to think that it was pretty funny.

To a French writer a situation like this may be irresponsibly amusing. The father of the "little dark horse," as the title puts it so facetiously, was stationed in the Congo for three years and relaxed occasionally. But to an American the situation suggests an entirely different set of implications, many of which are profoundly tragic. Probably one's emotions should not become involved in a slap-dash comedy of this nature. But to this playgoer Mr. Birabeau's lack of interest in the normal feelings of a bewildered colored boy outweighs his casual comedy about the outraged respectability of a provincial French family. The butt of his humor is a helpless lad whose only transgression against polite society is the fact that he is alive. "Little Dark Horse" is really sophisticated: its emotions are atrophied.

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As a whole, the performance is helter-skelter and haphazard. Cecilia Loftus represents a tyrannical grandmother with a grimness her personal good nature considerably weakens. Walter Slezak gives a genuinely comic performance as a valetudinarian bachelor with a love of food and comfort. The little colored boy is played with disarming innocence by R. V. Whitaker, and little Edmond Abel gives an engaging performance as a white boy of very few years. Leona Powers, Ann Mason, Grant Mills, Kathryn Givney and Raymond Roe play some unattractive parts as well as they can, and Rolfe Sedan as an ailing physician contributes some comic relief to the first act by belching. That gives you a sort of general idea.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 17, 1941*

"Little Dark Horse," a Pre-War French Farce, at the Golden

By WILELLA WALDORF

THEATRE GUILD directors are obviously under a severe strain. When, at rare intervals, they break out of the medieval austerity of Fifty-second Street, it is pretty certain that some sort of devilry is afoot. A little over a year ago Lawrence Langner turned up as co-author of "Suzanna and the Elders," a comedy of communal sex life in a socialistic community, which the Theatre Guild did not produce. Last night at the Golden Theatre Theresa Helburn figured as adaptor of "Little Dark Horse," a French farce by Andre Birabeau about an illegitimate child who happens to be black. The Guild didn't produce this one either.

If this sort of extracurricular activity continues, the Guild's subscribers are apt to be faced with the embarrassing necessity of requesting its directors either to curb their ebullient spirits in public, or to carry on their frivolous pranks under assumed names, lest the dignity of the Guild be seriously impaired.

"Little Dark Horse," which Miss Helburn went to the trouble to adapt from the French (pre-war, of course), concerns the goings-on in a provincial family when the ailing Francois Monfavet's wife and mother-in-law decide that it is only right that he be given an opportunity to have a death-bed chat with his illegitimate son attending a military school near Bordeaux. Nobody actually knows much about the youngster, beyond the fact that he exists, and when Uncle Emil is sent to fetch him, back he comes with a handsomely uniformed colored boy in tow.

The presumably side-splitting developments include the reaction of Francois' three legitimate children to their little black stepbrother, much discussion of father's three years in the Congo as an engineer, and the efforts of Uncle Emil to avoid another uncomfortable train journey back to the military school to return the youth who had turned out to be the wrong color.

Miss Helburn has not attempted to Americanize the play unduly, retaining the original French names for the characters, and as much of the Gallic spirit as possible. But the company is anything but French, and the comedy, while it may have seemed very funny abroad, is amusing on Broadway chiefly when Walter Slezak and Cecilia Loftus as the brow-beaten Uncle Emil and his tyrannical mother are holding forth.

Both Mr. Slezak and Miss Loftus squeeze every ounce of merriment out of their parts, but the theme of "Little Dark Horse" seems hardly the brightest of farce material in this country, whatever it may have been in pre-war France. We found it, in fact, a generally distasteful play. There were, however, a number of people in the first-night audience who apparently did not agree, for there was a good deal of loud guffawing from time to time.

"Little Dark Horse"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 17, 1941*

'Little Dark Horse,' Little Pale Comedy, Opens at the Golden Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IT IS obviously a little difficult to think of miscegenation as a subject for sentimental comedy, but Andre Birabeau, the original author of last evening's "Little Dark Horse," can take difficulties like that in his stride. Miss Theresa Helburn, acting as adapter, has assisted him in making the theme innocuous, so that nothing that happens at the Golden Theater is at all apt to disturb anybody—or, for that matter, keep anybody very wide awake.

Miss Helburn and M. Birabeau tell of a minor domestic entanglement in the French provinces, a year or so precataclysm. M. Monfavet is ill and his wife, discovering that he is supporting an illegitimate son in boarding school, magnanimously sends for the little fellow so that he may join the death-bed circle. The little fellow, brought by a puffing uncle, turns out to be a small engaging imp and to all appearances 100 per cent African. Seems that papa had spent three years in the Congo once and been waited upon by a Negro woman who was beautiful and kind.

It takes the authors a full act to reach this not very advanced point in their story and two more acts to picture the tiny confusions which result after papa gets well. There are some nice scenes between the legitimate children and little, black Noel, and now and then it seems as if one or other of the authors —Miss Helburn, for a guess—were trying to get around to some comment on racial tolerance. Nothing much comes of this. Nothing much comes of any of it, except now and then a friendly quality and once or twice a touching scene.

"Little Dark Horse" is not particularly well written, nor always well acted. Possibly the major problem, however, has been the fitting of theme to method. This special racial problem is not apt to seem a comic one to American audiences. The French attitude is less extreme. But the characters, which have come from Miss Helburn's hand, are French chiefly by force of nomenclature, and one persists in thinking of them as Americans who are rather oddly named and are, considering their nationality, behaving very peculiarly. Confusion is thus engendered, enhancing the tedium which derives from a thin story not very well told.

Walter Slezak is amusing as the put-upon uncle and all the youngsters—Raymond Roe, Anita Magee and Edmond Abel and R. V. Whitaker—are pleasant to watch. Cecilia Loftus is not given much to work with and some of the other performances partake of the play's thinness. I don't know that Melville Burke's direction has helped much, either, or that it was ever a good idea to drag "Little Dark Horse" out of the French.

'LITTLE DARK HORSE'

A comedy in three acts, adapted by Theresa Helburn from the French of Andre Birabeau; directed by Melville Burke; setting by John Koenig; presented at the John Golden Theatre on November 16, 1941, by Donald Blackwell and Raymond Curtis. The cast:

Agatha	Wauna Paul
Dr. Roubert	Rolfe Sedan
Louise Monfavet	Leona Powers
Mme. Onzain	Cecilia Loftus
Catherine (Cathy)	Anita Magee
Jean-Pierre (Jipe)	Raymond Roe
Patrick (Patoche)	Edmond Abel
Mme Vellenaud	Kathryn Givney
Mme. Monfavet	Ann Mason
Emil Onzain	Walter Slezak
Noel	R. V. Whitaker
Francois Monfavet	Grant Mills

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 17, 1941*

'Little Dark Horse' Opens at the Golden

Cecilia Loftus and Walter Slezak in Play About Problems of Parenthood

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH Andre Birabeau has the knack of writing about children without making them sound like child actors, it is not a talent large enough to sustain a play through a whole evening. He suggested the poignant if unusual woes of adolescent parenthood a couple of years ago in "Dame Nature," and last night at the John Golden Theatre he discussed the problem of a French pre-war household facing a difficult situation.

The three children, Mamma, and Grand Mamma all have to face the fact (with the audience) that naughty Papa not only has an illegitimate offspring, but that the offspring is unmistakably colored. You see Papa spent three years in the Congo and didn't keep his mind on his engineering.

Since M. Birabeau seems interested chiefly in the comic aspects of his material, I must report that it didn't strike me as being particularly funny. There are plenty of the usual sex snickers over the rascally father being caught out, but somehow the spectacle of a little black boy being used as a comedy gag in what for him was a tragical situation appeared considerably less than convulsing.

I do not believe that the author, or his adapter, Theresa Helburn meant for a moment to be heartless. In fact one scene in which the three children tell their dark half-brother that they want him in the family, is written with touching sympathy.

The conversation between the erring father and his eldest (and quite legitimate) son is done with tenderness and insight, but behind all the play's effortful laughter lurks a fact that is stubbornly nearer heartbreak.

No Rule Applies

There is, of course, no rule about this for an author is privileged to choose any material he pleases and treat it any way he likes. If he wishes to make a pair of homicidal maniacs hilarious, and turns out "Arsenic and Old Lace" he drowns out all criticism in the roar of laughter at his success. But the trick of "Arsenic and Old Lace" is that you never see the martyrs of its joke. M. Birabeau's comedy tries to laugh in the embarrassing presence of its unhappy little victim.

Yet even apart from this fundamental error I suspect that "Little Dark Horse" on its own terms, is not a very good play. It takes up the whole first act to set up the scaffolding of the plot, until there seemed to be more lumber than story. The two grandmothers have their say; the town busybody pops in and out sniffing out scandal; the old doctor has the hiccups, a heart attack, and so on to keep the business simmering in conversation and create a suspense that simply doesn't hold. It is cluttered with wearisome and irrelevant details so that when it does reach its point, which is to foist the guilty parenthood off on a bachelor uncle, it doesn't seem worth all the trouble.

Thanks largely to Cissie Loftus and Walter Slezak and a couple of the youngsters some of the details are made pleasantly amusing. Miss Loftus needs sharper material to work with, but she makes the most of what she has, and Mr. Slezak manages to be funny in a part that rigorously repeats itself throughout the play.

As the youngest of the legitimate children Master Edmond Abel is excellent and R. V. Whitaker plays the little dark horse of the title with a disarming gravity that is a reproach to the jokesters. John Koenig's single setting is admirable.

The play was tried out at Westport last Summer but I'm afraid its audience wasn't.